United Nations ICCD/COP(12)/13

Convention to Combat Desertification

Distr.: General
7 July 2015

Original: English

UNITED NATIONS
DEPOSITORY

OCT 01 2015

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Conference of the Parties
Twelfth session
Ankara, Turkey, 12–23 October 2015
Item 6 (a) of the provisional agenda
Procedural matters
Maintenance of the roster of experts and the creation, as necessary, of ad hoc panels of experts

Report on the maintenance of the roster of independent experts

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Conference of the Parties (COP), by its decision 26/COP.11, invited Parties to propose new candidates for the roster of independent experts (ROE) in order to achieve better representation of all relevant disciplines, including traditional and local knowledge, know-how and practices, and of women, as well as a more balanced geographical distribution of non-governmental organizations. The COP further urged Parties to confirm which of their experts currently on the ROE are to remain and to nominate new experts, as they deem necessary.

By the same decision, the COP requested the secretariat to: (a) perform a validation process of all experts in the ROE and remove those experts who have not been confirmed by the relevant national focal points by 31 March 2014; (b) set up web-based facilities that allow for the direct electronic application and update of information by individual experts; and (c) make available updated statistics related to the ROE.

This document contains a report of the activities carried out by the secretariat in this regard, describes the current status of the composition and use of the ROE as at 30 April 2015 and presents options for consideration by the COP on how to improve the use of the ROE.

GE.15-11437(E)

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I. Background

1. Article 24, paragraph 2, of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) states that "The Conference of the Parties shall establish and maintain a roster of independent experts with expertise and experience in the relevant fields. The roster of independent experts (ROE) shall be based on nominations received in writing from the Parties, taking into account the need for a multidisciplinary approach and broad geographical representation." By its decision 18/COP.1, the Conference of the Parties (COP) decided to establish and maintain a ROE on the basis of the procedures attached to that decision. Paragraphs 2 and 3 of these procedures indicate that Parties may nominate experts for the ROE, taking into account the need for a multidisciplinary approach, an appropriate gender balance and broad and equitable geographical representation, and that the nominations should be communicated by the Parties to the secretariat through diplomatic channels.

2. By its decisions 13/COP.2, 15/COP.3, 15/COP.4, 15/COP.5, 13/COP.6, 13/COP.7, 11/COP.8, 21/COP.9, 23/COP.10 and 26/COP.11, the COP provided further guidance on the maintenance of the ROE.

3. By decision 26/COP.11, paragraph 3, the COP adopted an updated list of disciplines and thematic areas, as agreed by the Bureau of the Committee on Science and Technology and provided in annexes I and II to document ICCD/COP(11)/15.

4. In paragraph 7 of the same decision, the COP requested the secretariat to: (a) set up web-based facilities that allow for the direct electronic application and update of information by individual experts to the ROE; (b) perform a validation process of all experts in the ROE every four years; (c) remove from the ROE experts who have not been confirmed by the relevant national focal points (NFPs) by 31 March 2014; (d) communicate directly with experts, through e-mail or by post, in order to provide information on access to the ROE, the editing of personal data, opportunities offered by the ROE, as well as scientific and technical information; and (e) make available updated statistics related to the ROE, its gender balance, and representation by discipline on the UNCCD website.

5. In paragraph 8 of the same decision, the COP requested the secretariat to involve the experts on the ROE in the various activities of the UNCCD, including participation in working groups, surveys and peer reviews as appropriate.

II. Current status, maintenance and use of the roster of independent experts

6. In accordance with decision 26/COP.11, the secretariat conducted a validation process of all experts in the ROE and removed from it those experts who had not been confirmed by the relevant NFPs by 31 March 2014.

7. Updated statistics related to the ROE, including gender balance and representation by discipline, are available on the UNCCD website.[1] Updated information on experts is currently available on the UNCCD website in the "national contacts" section, which provides a list of all experts by each country, along with all relevant information.

8. As at 30 April 2015, the following general observations may be made about the roster:

[1] <http://www.unccd.int/en/programmes/Science/Roster-of-Experts/Pages/default.aspx>.

(a) The total number of experts in the ROE is 1,284. Compared with 1 June 2013 (when the ROE consisted of 1,954 experts from 94 Parties) there has been a decrease by about 34 per cent in the number of experts;

(b) Nominations have been provided by 81 Parties, representing about 70 per cent of the total number of Parties. Figure 1 and the table in the annex to this document show the total distribution of experts by UNCCD Regional Implementation Annex and by subregion, plus experts nominated by Parties not belonging to a Regional Implementation Annex. Annex I (Africa) and Annex II (Asia) have nominated the most experts, totalling 379 and 391 experts, respectively. The Pacific as a subregion has not nominated any experts;

(c) The gender balance was about 84 per cent male (1074 experts) and 16 per cent female (210 experts), a slight improvement compared with the situation in 2013;

(d) Concerning the grouping by discipline, it is to be noted that each expert can indicate up to four disciplines of expertise. Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown by discipline, while in figure 3 the disciplines have been grouped into two general categories, social sciences and natural sciences, in order to better understand the distribution. Environmental sciences/ecology is the most widely represented discipline (it was indicated 670 times), followed by agricultural sciences (307) and soil science (284). More broadly, expertise in disciplines belonging to the natural science category was indicated 2548 times, while expertise in disciplines belonging to the social science category was indicated 162 times;

(e) The countries represented in the ROE provide on average 16 experts. This average ranges from 7 experts per country in Annex V (Central and Eastern Europe) to 23 experts per country in Annex II (Asia).

9. The implementation of the web-based system referred to in paragraph 4 above was planned to be undertaken in parallel with the consolidation of all secretariat databases. However, it has not yet been possible to complete this task owing to the lack of adequate information technology (IT) facilities.

10. The ROE is an important tool to promote the participation of individual scientists and experts in activities related to the implementation of the Convention, at both the national and the international level, although the lack of adequate IT facilities means that it has not been possible to make full use of the ROE. Nevertheless, the secretariat has encouraged NFPs and science and technology correspondents on various occasions to nominate experts to participate in the international scientific process in the context of desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD). For instance, in 2014, the secretariat informed NFPs about the possibility of nominating experts for the full scoping of the thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration conducted by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and for contributing to the actual assessment in 2015. In addition, the secretariat invited experts on the ROE nominated by countries belonging to the Sahel and the Middle East and North Africa regions to participate in a survey organized by the Sahara and Sahel Observatory at the occasion of the UNCCD 3rd Scientific Conference.

III. Recommendations

11. The COP at its twelfth session may wish to:

(a) Request the secretariat to facilitate the involvement of experts from the ROE in the following activities, as appropriate:

(i) Participate in scientific events, including technical expert meetings, international and regional conferences organized as part of the mechanism for the provision of scientific advice to the UNCCD as outlined and proposed by the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) in document ICCD/COP(12)/CST/6;

(ii) Act as reviewers of science–based products elaborated under the supervision of the SPI;

(iii) Participate in international expert panels and assessments on DLDD topics, as experts nominated by the secretariat or by Parties;

(iv) Act as reviewers of the IPBES thematic assessment of land degradation and restoration;

(v) Provide relevant information to the UNCCD knowledge platforms such as the Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal and the Capacity Building Marketplace;

(b) Request the secretariat to integrate the ROE database into the Scientific Knowledge Brokering Portal in order to enable more efficient and easier use of the database, including the option to search for experts by discipline and country;

(c) Encourage Parties to propose new experts in order to achieve a better gender balance within the ROE and to enlist more experts from the social sciences, including experts on traditional and local knowledge, know-how and practices.

Annex

Statistical analysis of the roster of independent experts

Figure 1
Total regional distribution of experts in the roster of independent experts, including total male and female experts

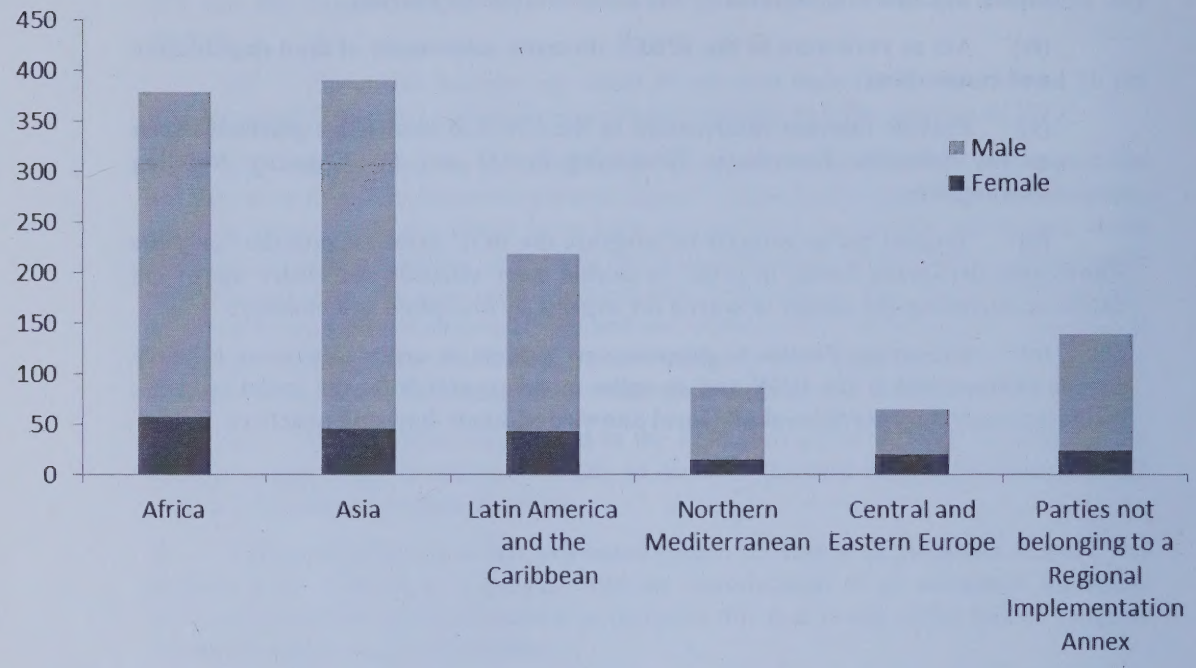

Table
Total number and percentage of experts by region and subregion

	Number of experts	*Percentage of experts (%)*
Africa (Annex I)	**379**	**29.66**
Central Africa	44	3.44
Eastern Africa	77	6.03
Northern Africa	49	3.83
Southern Africa	24	1.88
Western Africa	185	14.48
Asia (Annex II)	**391**	**30.59**
Central Asia	43	3.36
East Asia	213	16.67
Pacific	0	0
South Asia	74	5.79
South-East Asia	38	2.97
West Asia	23	1.80
Latin America and the Caribbean (Annex III)	**219**	**17.14**
Andean region	42	3.29
Caribbean	48	3.76
Mesoamerica	49	3.83
South Cone	80	6.26
Northern Mediterranean (Annex IV)	**86**	**6.73**
Central and Eastern Europe (Annex V)	**70**	**5.01**
Not included in Regional Implementation Annexes	**139**	**10.88**

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Figure 2

Repartition of experts by discipline (up to four disciplines per expert)

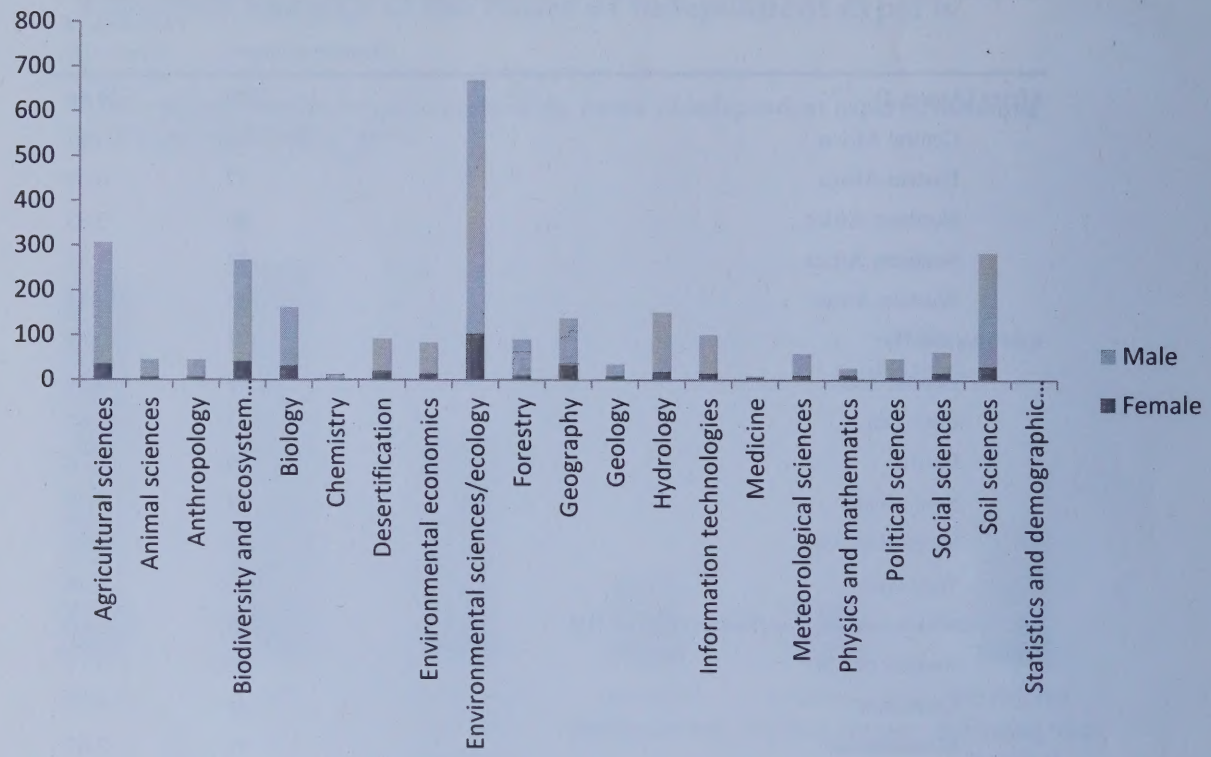
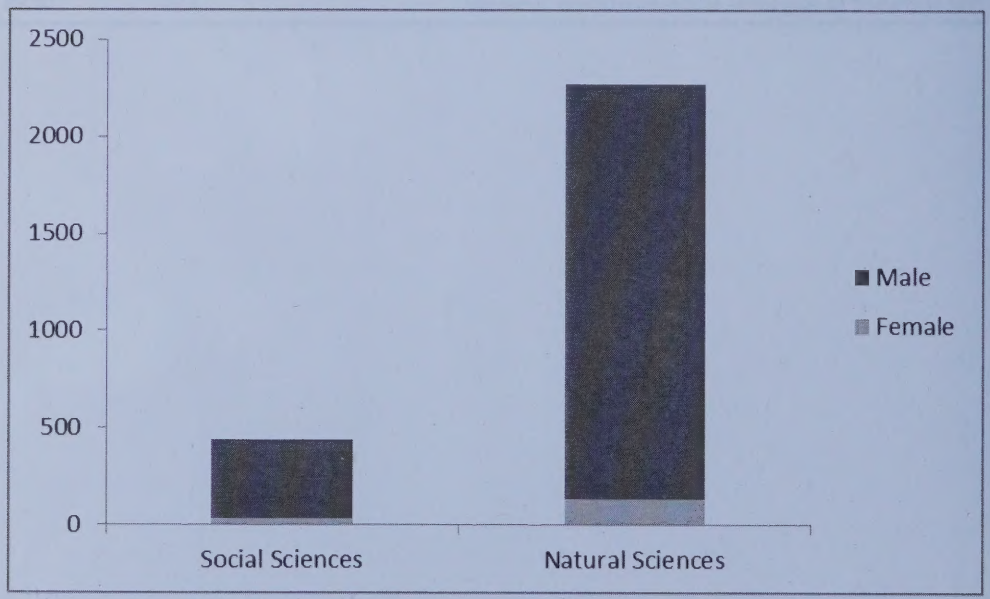


Figure 3

Repartition of experts by discipline cluster (up to four disciplines per expert)